

# Swwweet!

Who *doesn't* love maple syrup? It's a treat that can't be beat—  
AND it's fun to make. Check it out!



BY RUSSELL, BEN, AND EMMA FOX, AS TOLD TO ELLEN LAMBETH; PHOTOS BY PAULA LERNER

Honey may come from bees, but syrup comes from trees. Maple trees, that is.

We're the Fox family, and we live in Vermont. Our state tree is the sugar maple. There are millions of sugar maples in Vermont. That's a lot of trees to make syrup from!

We have tons of these trees in the woods behind our house, and every year we use them to make our own maple syrup. That's called "sugaring." Have you ever wondered how it's done? Come along for a sneak preview and see how we all pitch in.

**Ben:** In late winter, my family gets serious about sugaring. We hike into the woods to check for any damage to our trees or equipment. But we *really* get down to business by early spring. That's when the days warm up and the sap starts to rise. (Sap is the liquid that flows from a tree's roots to the rest of the tree to help it grow. It contains minerals and—best of all—sugars.)



**Russell:** First, we tap the trees for sap by drilling some holes. (It doesn't harm the trees.) In the photo at **left**, Ben and my dad watch me drill. That red marker shows me how deep to go.

**Emma:** Tapping trees and putting up tubing are my favorite parts of sugaring. **Below left**, Dad helps me tap a tiny spout called a *spile* into one of the holes we drilled.

**Russell:** The dark-blue tube fits in the spile and carries sap to the light-blue tube. Lots of those tubes crisscross our woods and connect to a main pipe. Sap flows downhill through all of them into a big storage tank.

**Ben:** We also collect some sap the old-fashioned way, using a different kind of spile (**below**). We'll hang a covered bucket on that hook to collect the dripping sap. But first, Russell tries to catch a drop!



**Emma:** I love sipping sap when it drips out of the tree. But it doesn't taste sweet like syrup.

**Russell:** That's because it's mostly water. You need 40 gallons of sap to make just one gallon of yummy syrup!

**Ben:** My sister and I race each other to the buckets. It's fun to peek under the covers to see how much sap has dripped in. **Above,** Emma pours the sap into another bucket. Then we carry it over to a holding tank



on our tractor. I help Russell pour it into the tank (**left**).

**Emma:** All the sap from the buckets and the tubes ends up at our sugarcane house (**below left**). This was once an old barn my dad saw near our town. The owner let him take it down and rebuild it—board by board—on our front lawn. When you see steam rising out the top, you know we're boiling sap!

**Russell:** Boiling is my personal favorite thing about sugaring. That's because we're so close to that delicious golden liquid!

**Ben:** There's a big piece of equipment in the sugarcane house called an *evaporator*. When you boil the sap in the evaporator pans, most of the water escapes into the air as steam, leaving the sweet stuff behind.

**Russell:** The more it steams, the thicker—and sweeter—it gets. I use a scoop to test the thickness (**above right**).

**Ben:** I like controlling the valve (**right**). I watch the thermostat closely. When it reaches 219° F exactly, the syrup is ready. I open the valve and let it flow out into a clean bucket. The best part about this job is that I'm closer than anyone to tasting each new batch! The hardest part is waiting for it to cool off.





We sell the syrup. But I also like giving it away to our friends because it makes them happy.

**Ben:** My mom and dad know lots of uses for maple syrup. Of course, we drench our pancakes in it, as you can see on Russell's plate **below**.

**Russell:** You can also pour it over ice cream—or snow.

(Check out the recipe—and meet Mom—on page 5.) It's delicious on ham and eggs—even on broccoli. Try it as a glaze when you grill meat. And don't even get me started on maple sugar crystals (like rock candy, only better)!

**Emma:** How does our syrup taste? I can tell you in just four words: out of this world! 🐼



**Russell:** Next we have to filter the syrup to remove any gritty leftover tree minerals.

**Emma:** Then we put it in bottles and jugs (**above**). I help my mom and dad put labels on them. The labels tell who made the syrup (Fox Family) and what grade it is. You decide the grade by its color (**top**). The lightest has the mildest flavor and is called "fancy." The darkest is "grade B." But all of it tastes sweet and good!

